

WILD WEST

WEEKLY

A MAGAZINE CONTAINING STORIES, SKETCHES Etc. OF WESTERN LIFE.

Issued Weekly—By Subscription \$2.50 per year. Application made for Second Class Entry at the N. Y. Post Office.

No. 204.

NEW YORK, SEPTEMBER 14, 1906.

Price 5 Cents.

YOUNG WILD WEST AND "CROOKED" THE COWBOYS; OR, ARIETTA AND THE CATTLE STAMPEDE.

AN OLD SCOUT.

YOU



The maddened cattle were rapidly bearing down upon Arietta. Young Wild West saw her danger. Like a meteor the sorrel darted forward. "Keep cool, Et!" shouted the dashing young deadshot. A moment later he reached her and caught her about the waist.

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Issued Weekly — By Subscription \$2.50 per year. Application made for Second Class entry at the New York, N. Y., Post Office, Entered according to Act of Congress, in the year 1906, in the office of the Librarian of Congress, Washington, D. C., by Frank Tousey, Publisher, 24 Union Square, New York.

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Young Wild West and the Crooked Cowboys

OR,

Arietta and the Cattle Stampede

By AN OLD SCOUT

CHAPTER I.

YOUNG WILD WEST AT CHAMPION RANCH.

"Well, here we are at Champion Range again! It will be a little change for us up here in Western Nebraska, for it is altogether too hot down in Arizona at this time of year."

The speaker was Young Wild West, the Champion Deadshot of the West. He was mounted on his spirited sorrel stallion, Spitfire, and the remark left his lips as he came to a halt in front of a neat-looking ranch-house.

His words were addressed to his two partners, Cheyenne Charlie and Jim Dart, and three girls, all of whom halted when he did.

Two of the girls were quite young, though they had about grown as tall as they would ever be, and one was probably in the neighborhood of twenty-five.

The latter was Anna, the wife of Cheyenne Charlie.

One of the younger girls was a handsome blonde and the other a brunette.

The blonde was Arietta Murdock, the sweetheart of Young Wild West, and the brunette had promised to marry Jim Dart when they reached the proper age.

Young Wild West was the best known young hero of the Wild West that has ever been written of. He was but a boy in years, but a man in every other sense.

Of medium height and weight, with the figure of a well-trained athlete, graceful and quick as lightning, cool, daring and brave, with an inclination to be reckless sometimes, he was the ideal boy of the Great West.

He owned gold and silver mines outright and had interests in others. His two partners, Cheyenne Charlie and Jim Dart, were not only called partners because they were interested in business with him, but because they were his inseparable companions.

Champion Ranch was situated in the western part of Nebraska, not far from Wyoming on the west and Colorado on the south.

At the time of which we write the country in that section was in a much wilder state than it now is.

The few ranches that were scattered about were far apart and a ride of a hundred miles to a little town, where there was a store, was nothing.

Young Wild West had traded a ranch in Wyoming for Champion Ranch, as he called it, and, though he made little or no money from the venture, he felt that it was nice to have a place of his own to come to when he felt so inclined.

The young deadshot and his partners and the girls traveled a great deal around the West and Southwest, principally for the excitement and adventure they derived from it.

Young Wild West was known far and near as a terror to evil-doers and the champion of right.

He was about as dashing in his general appearance as a boy could be, for, besides being handsome in face and figure, he had a wealth of long chestnut hair hanging over his shoulders, and as he invariably wore a buckskin hunting suit that was elaborately trimmed with scarlet silk fringe he had a sort of distinguished look.

His two partners wore the same kind of attire and the

girls were fitted out in appropriate costumes for the outdoor life they led.

They were all armed, and the girls could ride and shoot, too, more especially Arietta, who had been reared on the border in the troublous times with the Indians.

As they halted at the ranch, and Young Wild West made the remarks quoted at the opening of our story, they all agreed with the dashing young deadshot that they were glad to get there.

Bud Gregory, the foreman of the ranch, and his wife were waiting on the porch to greet them, and soon there was much handshaking and kisses being exchanged by the ladies.

"So you thought you'd come around an' see how things was on ther ranch, hey?" said the foreman. "We happened ter catch sight of yer ther minute yer come over ther hill a mile down ther trail. I knowed jest who yer was ther minute I seen yer, an' I jest calls the old woman out an' tells her."

"Yes, an' ther first thing what I recognized was them two Chinamen you've got with you," spoke up the foreman's wife. "You don't see many Chinese around this part of ther country, an' that makes 'em more apt ter be noticed when you do see 'em. I could tell 'em by them short Mother Hubbard coats they've got on."

The two Chinamen mentioned were Hop and Wing, the servants of Young Wild West and his friends.

They had brought up the rear of the party as it came to a halt in front of the house, and they still sat on their ponies, and holding the halters of the two pack-horses they had been leading.

The rest had all dismounted, of course.

"Look at ther two yaller galoots!" exclaimed Cheyenne Charlie. "They set there jest as though they didn't know what ter do. Git down there, you heathen!"

The pair dismounted in a hurry.

"No puttee uppee tent; no know whattee do," remarked the fellow called Hop in a squeaky voice.

"I guess you know what to do," observed Young Wild West. "Get the pack-horses unloaded and what they have been carrying in the storehouse over there. Then put the horses in the stable."

"Allee light, Misler Wild; me undelstand putty quick allee samee," and the Celestial then began to sing in Chinese.

The other one, however, flew to obey the command.

There was nothing about him that would suggest anything smart, but he showed his willingness to work.

This particular Chinaman was nothing more than the average of his countrymen that come across the Pacific to better their conditions in life.

He was honest, a good cook and willing worker, and that was all that could be expected from a Chinese servant, or any other kind, for that matter.

Hop, on the other hand, was one of the smartest Chinamen ever born.

He had his faults, too, as will be seen later on.

He was a sleight-of-hand performer of no mean ability, but to look at him one would think that he was even more innocent than his brother Wing.

He followed Wing to the storehouse, and there they unloaded the pack-horses.

Bud Gregory called his darky man of all work to take the horses of the rest of the party, and then they all went into the house.

It was just a trifle after twelve o'clock when our friends arrived at Champion Ranch, and it so happened that the foreman and his wife had not yet eaten dinner, as they invariably call the noon-day meal in that part of the country.

"I reckon ther old woman will soon fix up enough fur all hands ter eat," Bud Gregory said. "If she don't it will be mighty funny."

"Oh, I guess we'll make out all right," replied Young Wild West. "How are things on the ranch, Bud?"

"Putty fair," was the reply. "But we've been havin' a little diffikilty ther last few days with some sheep-herders. A galoot named Jerry Hawkins started a sheep ranch over ter ther east of us a month or so ago, an' he's got a way of lettin' ther blamed sheep git over on our range. Sheep eats ther grass so clean that it ain't apt ter sprout up ag'in, an' about fifty acres of our grazin' land has been ruined by 'em. I've seen Hawkins an' talked ter him about it, an' all ther answer he gives is that our cattle git over on him sometimes, an' nothin' else kin be expected but that sheep will come over on us now an' then. He's a regular hog, an' he's got a bad set of men workin' fur him. Seven of our cowboys quit Saturday, jest on account of ther sheep-herders, an' I've got six new ones what jest come yisterday."

"Well, boys," observed the dashing young deadshot, as he turned to his partners, "I guess we just struck here in the right time. We'll soon show Hawkins that he has got to keep his sheep off our lands. I see no reason why our cowboys can't keep the cattle where they belong, and if they can't do it we will hire some that will. Then if Hawkins and his herders don't see fit to keep their sheep where they belong they will find themselves in trouble."

Bud Gregory looked pleased when he heard this.

"I knowed you would soon straighten it out if you was here," he said. "I'm awful glad you come."

The dinner was soon prepared by Mrs. Gregory, and then all hands sat down and ate as only people with good appetites can.

The fare was wholesome and well-suited to them, so there was nothing to prevent them from enjoying it.

After dinner Wild went over the accounts with Gregory and found that there was very little profits for him since he had been there last.

Still there was some gain, and that was satisfactory to him.

Bud was making a good living out of it, and the cowboys were paid good wages, so they were getting the benefit of it anyhow.

So long as it was not running behind Wild was satisfied.

He wanted the ranch for a place to come once in a while, as he had a good income from his various mining ventures he was pleased to let it be that way.

Wild knew that Gregory was thoroughly honest, and when he had gone over the books and found them correct in every detail he decided to take a ride out and see what damage the sheep had been doing to the cattle range.

He called Charlie and Jim, and leaving the girls in charge of Mrs. Gregory, they went with the foreman to the stable and got horses.

Our hero and his partners did not take their own horses, as they were tired, but as there were plenty there belonging to the ranch they had a choice of what they wanted.

There was nearly a thousand cattle on Champion Ranch, and as prices were expected to be good in the fall there was a hope of making some money when the cattle were driven to market.

"I guess we will take a look at the cowboys first," said our hero, as they rode away from the barn. "I want to see the six new fellows you hired, Bud."

"All right," was the foreman's reply. "I sent them out to keep the cattle away from the lands of Jerry Hawkins, an' ter watch that his sheep-herders didn't let ther sheep git over on us any more. It's off ter ther southwest about three miles. Come on."

The four were soon riding in that direction.

They had not covered more than two miles when they saw a number of men resting under the shade of a little grove of cottonwood trees, not far from the banks of the Platte.

There were about a dozen of them, and Wild quickly asked Bud if they all belonged to the ranch.

"No," was the reply, as the foreman shaded his eyes with his hand and took a look. "If I ain't mistaken there's some of ther sheep-herders there, talkin' ter them new cowboys. Thunder! There's about five hundred sheep on ther range, too. What do yer think of that? I sent them galoots out here ter stop that very thing."

Our hero nodded and smiled.

"If they can't stop it I guess I will," he answered. "Come! I am in a sort of hurry to get there."

Cheyenne Charlie chuckled and looked at Jim Dart.

"I reckon there's goin' ter be some fun putty soon," he ventured.

"Quite likely," was the reply.

The four were not long in reaching the group of cottonwoods.

The men sitting under the trees did not offer to get up until they rode up and halted.

"Boys, what does this mean?" Gregory called out. "What are yer havin' here, a little picnic?"

The question was caused by the appearance of a couple of stone jugs on the ground.

That the jugs contained whisky was evident, for the men were all more or less under the influence of the stuff.

"Hello, boss!" called out one of the cowboys. "Have a little drink with us. We're havin' a picnic all right."

Bud saw that the six new men were there, and also that five of the sheep-herders were with them.

Young Wild West quickly dismounted.

"You fellows who hired to work on Champion Ranch, stand up!" he exclaimed.

They all got up, and then one of them picked up a jug and said:

"Have a drink, young feller?"

Out came the young deadshot's revolver in a hurry.

Crack!

He fired and shattered the jug and the contents poured over the ground, leaving the handle and part of the jug in the man's hand.

With an oath, the cowboy hurled the part he held at the boy.

But Wild dodged it, and then springing forward quickly he struck him a blow with his fist and sent him sprawling on the ground.

"That's Young Wild West, ther owner of Champion Ranch, boys!" cried Bud. "You had better look out what you do."

"Stand still, you measly coyotes!" exclaimed Cheyenne Charlie, pulling a revolver from his belt. "I'll shoot ther first one what moves!"

The eleven men were astounded.

They had not dreamed of anything like this happening when they saw Gregory riding up with the strangers.

Young Wild West's blood was up.

He saw right away that the cowboys were rascals, and that they had become on friendly terms with the sheep-herders.

That meant that they did not intend to look after the interests of Champion Ranch.

The fellow he had knocked down sat on the ground and looked at him in a dazed way.

"Do you want any more? If you do just get up and we'll have it out. You would have given me a nasty cut with that piece of broken jug if I had not been quick enough to dodge. I want you to understand that the men who work on this ranch can't drink tanglefoot and work at the same time. I don't care what you do when you have your time off, but no more of this!"

"I didn't know you was ther owner of ther ranch," said the man, as he got up slowly. "But since you've knocked me down I reckon it's my duty ter lick yer, whether yer own ther ranch or not. If I git discharged fur doin' it all right."

"Oh, you will never get discharged for whipping me. Don't let that worry you any. Just say when you are ready. I am only a boy, I know, but I reckon I can whip a prairie schooner load of such galoots as you. Sail right in and show what you are made of!"

The rest looked in amazement at the dashing young fellow.

He had such a cool and easy way about him that they could not help admiring him, in a certain sense.

"Lay down your shooters, an' I'll lay down mine. I don't want ter git shot if I lick yer, young feller," said the cowboy who had been knocked down.

"Certainly. But I never have to use a shooter on such a galoot as you, unless it is to trim his whiskers or something like that."

The man promptly threw his revolver and knife on the ground.

"I'm what they call a tough pill ter swaller!" he exclaimed, blustering. "My name are Jig-water Ike, an' I kin lick my weight in wildcats!"

"Come on," answered Young Wild West, as he handed his revolvers to Jim Dart. "I'll make you think you have struck more than your weight in wildcats before I get through with you, I'll warrant."

They faced each other and the cowboys and sheep-herders quickly formed a ring about them.

Cheyenne Charlie and Jim Dart stood where they could watch them all, their revolvers in their hands.

CHAPTER II.

YOUNG WILD WEST SHOWS THAT HE MEANS BUSINESS.

Young Wild West did not have the least doubt about his being able to whip the big cowboy,

"So your name is Jig-water Ike, is it?" he said, as he put out his left hand for a guard and stepped lightly toward him.

"That's what my name are," was the reply. "How does that feel, young feller?"

He struck out with his horny right fist as the words left his lips, missing the boy by over a foot.

Spat!

Wild gave him a smart tap on the nose with his left and then stepped back, smilingly.

The young deadshot was up to all the tricks in the line of boxing, and being very quick and cool under all circumstances, it would have been hard to find a man or boy to match him at the game, especially in the Wild West, where very little of that sort of fighting was indulged in.

Jig-water Ike was surprised.

It was evident that he thought the reason he had been knocked down at the start was because he had not been prepared for an attack of that kind.

But to miss striking a blow, and then get hit on the nose, was a little more than he expected.

"Come on," said Wild; "I guess you don't understand much about fighting, do you? Come right at me! Wipe up the ground with me! I like to be treated that way!"

"I'll wipe up ther ground with yer!" roared the irate cowboy. "I won't leave nothin' but a greasespot, either."

Then he made a savage rush, striking out with both hands.

But the man knew nothing whatever of the art of boxing.

If Wild had stood still and not warded off the blows he would have certainly gone down before that rush.

But he did not stand there.

He was not going to take the chances of being hit by the sledge-hammer fists of the cowboy.

He side-stepped and ducked, and then, as his assailant was passing him, he shot out a straight right and caught him behind the ear.

Down went the cowboy in a heap.

It hardly seemed possible that a mere boy could drop a big man like that.

But then Young Wild West was as big as the average man, and there was not the least doubt about his being as strong.

But coolness and good judgment are what counts.

"Whoopee!" yelled Cheyenne Charlie, as Jig-water Ike went down and rolled his eyes like a pig that had just received a thrust with a knife. "That's ther way ter do it, Wild. I'm goin' ter lick ther galoot what says it don't serve him jest right!"

The cowboy struggled to his feet and steadied himself.

Wild could have put him out with one punch just then, if he had wanted to, for the opening was clear.

But he was not going to do it.

He wanted to give him all the show in the world, and when he was whipped he expected to hear him acknowledge it.

Jig-water Ike made another rush for him, swinging both fists like a regular wind-mill that was out of order.

Wild got out his way and then sent him down with a blow between the eyes.

"You don't know how to fight, so what is the use?" he said, in disgust. "I thought first off that you was going to make it a little lively for me. Is there anyone else here who knows how to handle his fists any better than you do?"

There was a silence.

But presently one of the sheep-herders looked at the boy and said:

"You're putty good at shootin', too, I reckon? By ther way yer smashed that whisky jug with a bullet, yer might know somethin' about ther game."

"Well, I do know something about it, my friend. Just wait until Jig-water Ike gets enough and I will show you something in that line."

"I've got enough!" cried out the defeated cowboy, and then he gave a groan that caused Cheyenne Charlie to burst into a laugh.

"Poor feller," said the scout; "he's cryin' fur his mammy."

But the taunt had no effect on Jig-water Ike. He had all he wanted for the present, and he knew enough to keep still.

The sheep-herder acted as though he might be a crack shot.

He had a brace of revolvers in his belt that were silver-plated and fitted with pearl handles.

He looked more like a cowboy sport than he did like a common sheep-herder.

"Are you a pretty good shot?" Wild asked, looking at him calmly.

"I reckon I am," was the reply. "I ain't braggin' when I say I kin down any galoot what comes along. I've won more prizes in shootin' matches than yer kin shake a stick at."

"You are just the fellow I am looking for, then. I am known as the Champion Deadshot of the West. I am like you, for I don't believe in bragging, but I never yet met the man who could beat me at shooting. Just show what you can do, and if I don't beat you I'll turn the title I hold over to you."

"You never heard of Deadshot Pete, did yer?" and the sheep-herder puffed out his chest with a show of pride.

"No, I can't say that I ever did."

"Well, that's me. I'd be around ther big towns makin' money hand over fist from my wonderful shootin', if it wasn't fur one thing."

"What is the one thing?"

"Well, I sorter got mixed up in a bank robbery one night, an' I was forced ter light out of Denver an' work fur a livin'. I don't mind tellin' you this much, though I wasn't guilty of ther charge that was made ag'in me. It was a case of sarcumstantial evidence, an' that meant fur me ter quit ther town or go ter jail. I jest quit."

"Oh, I see! And now you are a common sheep-herder, looking for trouble."

"I ain't lookin' fur trouble, Young Wild West. I'm only goin' ter show yer that you don't know nothin' about shootin'."

"Oh, is that so? Well, just walk out of the way of the galoots you are standing with, and we will see who is the best shot."

"What do yer mean?"

"Just what I say," answered the young deadshot, coolly.

"You mean fur us ter shoot at each other?"

"Certainly."

"I didn't mean that way."

"What did you mean, then?"

"I meant that we would shoot at a mark an' see who was ther best shot."

"Is that so? Well, I have never yet met the man I was afraid to step out and shoot against—and shoot to kill, too. But if you want to shoot at a mark, why, go ahead and do it. I'll beat any shot you make, and I am not bragging, either, as I said before."

"All right. Do yer see that big knot on that tree over there?"

"Yes, I see it."

"Well, I'm goin' ter stand with my back toward it, and when you count three I'll turn around quick an' blaze

away at it. If I don't hit it you kin call me a lame coyote, or anything else yer please."

"Well, that would be a pretty good shot; go ahead! Let me see you do it."

The tree that had the knot to which the man referred was about twenty feet distant.

The knot itself was about five inches in diameter, so it was a pretty big target, after all.

But if Deadshot Pete, as he called himself, turned and fired quickly, and then hit it, it would be quite a decent shot, since he would have to fix the range in his mind before he turned his back to it and really shoot from memory.

Everybody got out of the way and the sheep-herder faced the knot for a few seconds.

Then he turned around, his revolver in his hand; and looked at Young Wild West.

"One—two—three!" Wild called out quickly.

Deadshot Pete swung around, waited a second and then pulled the trigger.

Crack!

As the report rang out one of the sheep-herders ran to the tree.

"He hit it!" was the cry that came from him. "That was a shot what can't be beat."

Wild and his partners walked over and found that the bullet had hit the knot, but pretty close to the left edge of it.

Still, the man had done what he said he would do, and that was pretty good.

"If I do that you will think I am about as good as you are at shooting," Wild said to the marksman.

"I reckon I will," was the reply, and the sheep-herder folded his arms across his stomach and looked as proud as an Indian with his first eagle feathers.

"All right. I'll try pretty hard to do as good as that. Was you shooting at the centre of the knot when you fired?"

"Of course. I aimed as near the centre as I could. That's the way anyone shoots when they're trying to hit the target."

"Well, I didn't know but that you were trying to hit the outside of the knot. I am going to shoot for the centre of it, where that little gnarl is."

Then the dashing young ranch-owner stepped to the exact spot that Deadshot Pete had fired from and asked him to count three.

Wild held his revolver with the muzzle pointing at the ground.

"One—two—three!"

The sheep-herder counted as quickly as he had done, and Wild swung around gracefully, his revolver going up over his head at the same time.

But the very instant he was facing the tree it came down on a level with a quick jerk.

Crack!

It was a quicker shot than Deadshot Pete had made, and they all knew it.

The same man who had rushed over to note the result before quickly announced that the bullet had hit in the centre of the knot.

Deadshot Pete shrugged his shoulders.

"I reckon you kin shoot as good as me, Young Wild West," he said.

"Do you think so?" was the reply.

"Yes, I feel sartin of it."

"But I hold the title of the Champion Deadshot of the West, you know."

"Then yer ought ter beat a feller like me."

"I think I can beat you. I am going to try, anyhow."

Wild looked around for something to shoot at.

He wanted to surprise the cowboys and sheep-herders.

One of the sheep-herders had a pipe in his mouth, and he was puffing away like a good fellow.

It was an old-time shot, but it always left a good impression with those who saw it, so our hero decided to shoot at the pipe.

"See if you can do this," he said, coolly, as he turned around and faced the unsuspecting man with the pipe.

Up went his hand, and then down came the revolver on a line with the bowl of the pipe.

Crack!

The shot was so unexpected that the man kept hold of the stem with his teeth, but the bowl had vanished.

"Wow!" cried the sheep-herder, as he took the stem from his mouth and held it in his hand.

"Thunder!" exclaimed Deadshot Pete. "I wouldn't try that on my best friend. I'm a dead shot, but I wouldn't risk hittin' a feller like that unless I didn't care whether he went under or not. You're a wonder, Young Wild West!"

"All right. I am glad you think so. Now, I am coming down to business. Bud Gregory tells me that there has been trouble about your sheep coming over on our cattle range for the past few days. I want that stopped."

"I reckon you'll have ter see Boss Hawkins, then. He owns ther sheep, an' it's his orders ter let 'em come over."

"All right. So much for you fellows. Now I want to talk to the men Buck hired to look after my interests."

Looking at Jig-water Ike, he continued:

"Do you like your job here?"

"Yes, as well as any I ever had," was the reply.

"How about the rest of you?"

He cast a sweeping glance at the others as he spoke.

They all hastened to assure him that they were perfectly satisfied with their job.

"Well, if that is the case," said Wild, "I want you to get those sheep off my property in a hurry. Get right at them, and it makes no difference where you drive them, so long as they get off our grazing grounds."

Then he looked over at the sheep-herders, who were now grouped together, and resumed:

"You fellows take my advice and look after your sheep.

You can tell your boss that he has got to keep his sheep off this range, or bullets will be apt to fly!"

CHAPTER III.

THE CHINAMAN, THE DARKY AND THE WHISKY.

There was no mistaking what the dashing young deadshot said, and the men who heard it showed that they understood.

As they started for the horses one of the cowboys made a move to pick up the remaining jug.

Crack!

Wild fired and shattered it.

There was not much in it at the time, but what there was soaked into the ground in a hurry.

"No whisky on this ranch during working hours, boys," he said, coolly. "Please remember that."

It was plain that they would have liked to resent the treatment they had received, but they were afraid.

They all rode off in a bunch, and a little way out they separated and scattered.

Young Wild West and his two partners rode along behind them, with the foreman.

"I guess we won't be over a couple of days in settling this business," our hero observed. "If the sheep get on us again I will go over and have a talk with Hawkins. I'll let him know that business is business, I'll bet!"

After they saw that the sheep were driven to their own territory, which took about an hour, for they were very obstinate, they turned to take a ride around and view the cattle that were grazing in the distance.

Wild knew it would be necessary to discharge the six new men, but he decided to wait and see just how they meant to act.

He was quite certain that they disliked him now, and as they were no doubt men without much principle, it was pretty certain that they would want to get square for the thrashing Jig-water Ike, their leader, had received at the hands of Wild.

"I'll attend to them when the time comes," he said. "I just want them to go ahead and see how far they will go. They are friends of the sheep-herders, and they only came here to work in the interest of the sheep range. What I have seen this afternoon proves that. I will fix Mr. Jig-water Ike, and there won't be any mistake about it!"

"Well, I reckon I would have discharged 'em right on ther spot, if you hadn't been with me when we caught 'em under them trees, an' ther sheep eatin' our grass clean ter ther roots," answered Gregory.

"And if you had the chances are that they would have gone to work for Jerry Hawkins before the day was out," spoke up Jim Dart.

"Sartin!" echoed the scout.

A thousand head of cattle grazing on the broad prairie is a pleasing sight, and when Young Wild West came in sight of the big herd he gave a nod of satisfaction.

"They seem to be in fine order, Bud," he said. "I guess we will strike it all right this fall."

"I reckon you'll have a chance ter say that ther ranch pays after we git rid of that lot," Bud answered.

"But if Hawkins' sheep eats all ther grass off I reckon ther cattle won't be as fat as they oughter be," the scout put in.

"I'll guarantee that Hawkins' sheep won't do much more damage than they have already," Wild declared.

They rode around to the herd and had a talk with several cowboys, who had been employed at the ranch when our friends last visited it, and as they all knew Young Wild West and his partners, they were delighted to see them.

Then they rode back to the ranch and found the girls helping Mrs. Gregory about the house.

It was something new for the girls, but they knew how to go ahead and do housework, and they insisted on helping, because they knew their coming had flustered the good woman somewhat.

It was about the middle of the afternoon when the work was all done, and then the girls made Mrs. Gregory come out on the veranda and sit and talk with them.

Wild and his partners were there, taking things easy.

"Where is the funny Chinee, who can do such wonderful tricks?" the foreman's wife asked, looking around and not seeing him anywhere about. "The other one is in the kitchen fixin' up something good for supper, he says. I know he's a wonderful cook, so that's why I let him go ahead. He wanted to do it, and I couldn't say no, because I like to eat what others cook once in a while, and it is seldom I get the chance."

"I wonder where Hop can be?" remarked Arietta. "I haven't seen him since you all rode away to have a look at the cattle."

"Where is your coon, Bud?" Wild asked, turning to the foreman.

"That's more'n I know," was the reply. "Like as not Hop has got him somewhere playin' cards fur money. That darky can't help gamblin' whenever he gits ther chance, it seems."

"Well, he knows better than to gamble with Hop," Wild answered. "I warned him not to do it the last time we were here."

"Warnin's don't do that boy no good," and Gregory shook his head. "He ain't got ther sense he was born with, anyhow. I never seen sich a dumb galoot as Bolivar is."

"I reckon I'll go an' look 'em up," observed the scout, as he arose and walked around to the rear of the house.

Charlie knew just about where to look for the Chinaman and darky, providing they really were indulging in a gambling game.

He put out for the little out-building where the broken harness and tools not in use were kept.

As he neared it he gave a nod, and a grin overspread his tanned face.

He heard the sound of voices, and one of them was unquestionably that of Hop Wah.

The scout walked lightly and soon reached the side of the building, where there was a small window.

The panes of glass were broken out of the window, but there was an old blanket hanging over it.

While Charlie could not see what was going on inside, he could hear plainly.

"Lat velly goodee tanglefoot, Misler Bolivar; me likee havee some more, allee samee," he heard Hop say.

"Yo' kin bet dat am good stuff," the voice of the darky answered. "Jig-water Ike, one of de new cowboys, done give me dat bottle. He say if me no tell Mister Gregory 'bout de liquor he done give me some more. Jig-water Ike an' him pards fetch ten gallons of de pure stuff over wid 'em when dey come to work from Hot Shot town. Dey hide it in dis buildin', 'cause I done tell dem dat it was jest de best place. Nobody come in here much at dis time of de year."

"Lat velly nicee tanglefoot allee samee, so be."

"Ther two galoots is gittin' drunk, I reckon," muttered the scout, under his breath. "I'll jest spoil their little game."

He left the window and walked around to the door, which he found open a few inches.

Hop was in the act of handing a bottle to the darky, after first taking a long pull at it.

Charlie drew his revolver and fired it in the air.

Bolivar let go the bottle and uttered a yell.

It fell to the floor, but before it could become emptied of its contents Hop grabbed it up.

"Misler Charlie!" he cried, as he saw the scout's face at the door. "Comee havee lillee dlink."

The Chinaman was so used to being interrupted in his little picnics by Wild and his partners that he had learned to be ready for them.

Charlie could not help grinning at the bland way of Hop.

The truth was that he did feel like having a "lille dlink" just then, and he hesitated.

The darky had now recovered, and he sat blinking at the scout.

Charlie stepped into the building and took the bottle from Hop.

"I reckon I will take a drop," he observed, and he did so.

Then he put the cork back in the bottle and started out.

"Where you go, Misler Charlie?" asked Hop.

"I'm goin' ter let Wild know that there's liquor hid here," was the reply. "If you ain't too drunk I reckon you'd better come around to ther front porch. Mrs. Gregory wants yer to do some tricks in magic."

"Allee light," and the Chinaman started after him.

The fact was that the Chinaman and darky had not been in the out-building very long.

Hop had been trying for over an hour to get Bolivar into some kind of gambling game, but the darky would not have it.

Anyhow, he had very little money, and when Hop learned that he ceased coaxing him.

After Bolivar had finished the work he had to do he had hinted that there was whisky close by.

That was sufficient to make Hop become very much interested.

The result was that the darky had taken him to the out-house, and Charlie came along just as they were getting interested.

When the scout came around to the front of the house with the bottle in his hand Young Wild West gave a nod.

"Whisky, eh?" he remarked. "So that was what was keeping Hop, was it?"

"I reckon that's right, Wild," answered Charlie. "I found ther two galoots in ther little buildin' what stands a little ways back of ther house. They was jest enjoyin' this bottle. Yer all heard me shoot, didn't yer?"

"Yes, and I knew what it meant pretty well, so that is the reason we didn't run around to see what caused it."

"Well, Hop was kind enough ter ask me ter have a drink, so I took one. It's mighty good stuff, too. Ther darky says as how Jig-water Ike an' his pards brought a whole lot of it with 'em when they come over from Hot Shot. It's hid in ther out-house, where I found these two galoots."

Hop and Bolivar were there now, so Charlie simply waved his hand at them.

"Is that a fact?" Bud Gregory demanded, jumping to his feet and looking hard at the darky.

"Dat am a fact, Mister Gregory," retorted Bolivar, not much abashed. "Jig-water Ike done give me dat bottle full of de whisky, so you can't blame me fur keepin' still about it. A bottlè of good licker is a whole lot to a poor nigger, you know."

Bolivar looked so innocent when he said this that those who heard him could not help laughing.

"Jest you show me where the rum is that Jig-water Ike brought here," said the foreman, angrily. "Hurry up, now! If yer don't show me it right away I'll pull your kinky wool out by ther roots!"

"I show yo', boss," answered the frightened darky, and he quickly led the way to the out-house.

Hop smiled blandly, as he watched them going away.

"Me velly solly lat tanglefoot found on um place," he said, shaking his head, sadly. "Me no likee um tanglefoot so closee by."

"Shut up, yer almond-eyed galoot!" cried the scout. "You mean that you're very sorry that it was found out that yer had it there."

"No, no, Misler Charlie, me no likee."

Mrs. Gregory really thought that he meant it.

"He is a temperate Chinaman," she remarked to Arietta. "I am sorry that Bolivar induced him to drink any of ther liquor."

"He doesn't need any inducing," was the girl's reply. "Don't for an inatant think that way, Mrs. Gregory."

"Is that so? Why, he is so innocent in his ways that one would not think there was any deceit about him."

"He kin lie ther legs off an iron pot!" exclaimed Charlie. "He's jest about ther worst galoot what ever wore a pig-tail."

Hop instantly assumed an injured air.

"Misler Charlie no likee poor Chinees," he said. "Me velly muchee goodee Chinees, me go to um Sunday school in 'Flisco, and me be velly goodee."

Gregory and the darky came back just then, and they had the whisky with them.

There were four demijohns, and how the cowboys had managed to smuggle it there no one knew.

"What are yer goin' ter do with it, Wild?" asked the foreman.

"Give it to the owners when we discharge them," was the reply. "I suppose it would be a good idea to destroy the demijohns and let the whisky run in the ground, but since they brought it they may as well have it. One thing, though, they won't have the pleasure of drinking it on this ranch."

The confiscated liquor was placed in a closet and locked up.

Gregory put the key in his pocket and declared that it would be safe there.

"Now, Hop," said Young Wild West, when the whisky was safe under lock and key, "if you are sober enough you can perform a nice little trick for Mrs. Gregory. I will let you off this time, but if I hear tell of you drinking whisky ag'in on these premises I am going to shoot out your eye-teeth. Do you hear?"

"Me undelstand, Misler Wild. Me never dlink no more tanglefoot; me no likee; niggee man say dlink, so me dlinkee; me no likee."

"Oh, it can't be that he is telling a lie," the foreman's wife declared. "I never heard a man talk that way when he was telling an untruth."

"Well, what I told you was right, though, Mrs. Gregory," said Arietta.

Hop smiled sadly and shook his head.

"Now me makee nicee lille tlick," he observed, brightening up, as though the incident was closed.

CHAPTER IV.

HOP PERFORMS A TRICK AND THEN HAS ONE PLAYED ON HIM.

All hands grew interested at once, especially the foreman's wife.

"Me havee uncle in China who velly gleet mandarin," said Hop, smiling at his audience. "He velly muchee smartee man, and me allee samee likee him. Me do nicee tlicks."

"Well, go ahead and do something, and never mind about your uncle," spoke up Cheyenne Charlie. "You're always tryin' ter say somethin' about an uncle in China, when ther fact is that yer never had an uncle, or anything else in ther line of a relative. I don't believe yer know

whether yer was ever born or not. Chinamen ain't born like other people, anyhow; they grow on trees, same as sour apples an' quinces."

"Misler Charlie makee velly big mistake," answered Hop, looking at Mrs. Gregory and putting on an injured air.

"Maybe you have, Charlie," said the woman, turning to the scout. "Don't hurt his feelings."

"All right; I won't hurt his feelin's, then," and Charlie chuckled.

Hop grinne

He was very much pleased to know that the good woman sympathized with him so strangely.

All hands were now sitting on the porch, so Hop walked out on the ground and faced them.

He was going to perform a trick in magic now, and he wanted them all to see it.

"Me likee havee lillie help," and then he looked at Bolivar and nodded for him to come forward.

The darky obeyed rather gingerly.

He acted as though he was just the least bit afraid of the Chinaman.

Wild knew very well that Hop meant to make the darky a victim of the trick he was going to perform.

While there was no doubt but that it would be mystifying to the foreman and his wife, there would be a laugh on Bolivar.

Hop was always ready to perform feats in magic.

He carried no end of chemicals and small articles in his pockets that were the means of making wonderful effects.

And as his hands were quicker than the eyes of those who watched him, he had no trouble in deceiving people.

Young Wild West and his friends had seen him do so many tricks that they were surprised at nothing he did.

Wild knew just how he did some of them, for they were very simple.

Just what the Celestial meant to do now they did not know, but our friends felt confident that he would not perform anything that was new to them.

But that made no difference; it was for the benefit of Mrs. Gregory, anyhow.

But the fact was that Hop was trying hard to do something that would get the best of all hands, Wild included.

He finally decided on something.

"Me likee havee quart of flour in um pan," he said, nodding at the foreman's wife.

"All right," was the reply; "you shall have it."

"Are you going to make bread, Hop?" Arietta asked.

He shook his head.

"Me makee velly nicee lillie tlick," was all he answered.

Mrs. Gregory brought out the flour in no time.

Hop thanked her and placed the pan on the ground near at hand.

"You watchee and see flour no go 'way allee samee putty quick," he remarked to the darky.

"I done guess dat it will stay dar, Mister Hop," was the reply. "Nobody come and take it."

"Allee light; you watchee."

So Bolivar sat down beside it and made up his mind that if anyone came and took the pan of flour they would have to take him with it.

Hop now took the big yellow silk handkerchief he always carried from his pocket.

It was a yard square, and had no doubt cost three or four dollars. Just now it was pretty clean, and Cheyenne Charlie could not help making a remark to that effect.

The Chinaman took from his pocket what appeared to be a round piece of wood that was about six inches long and a trifle smaller at one end than at the other.

It was not more than six inches in length and did not look to be anything more than an ordinary piece of wood cut in a round shape.

Hop calmly took it and slowly began to stretch it.

It kept lengthening until it was nearly three feet in length, while the foreman of the ranch and his wife looked on with bulging eyes.

There was nothing remarkable about it, though, for it was simply a jointed, hollow rod.

"I reckon that ain't much of a trick," observed Cheyenne Charlie, shrugging his shoulders.

"Velly nicee stickee," retorted Hop, smiling blandly.

Then he held it up, so all might view it, after which he proceeded to wrap the handkerchief around the stick.

He got it entirely concealed from view, and then he planted the big end in the ground.

"What are yer goin' ter do now?" asked Gregory.

"Me makee nicee lillie parasol," was the reply.

"A woman's umbrella, hey?"

Hop nodded.

Then he calmly took hold of the handkerchief at the top of the stick and slowly pulled it up.

Suddenly he gave a quick jerk and the handkerchief was crushed up in his hand and an open parasol of the Japanese sort was disclosed sticking in the ground.

Mrs. Gregory leaped forward and uttered an exclamation of delight.

"That is what I call wonderful!" she exclaimed. "How did he ever do it?"

"I reckon nobody knows but himself," answered her husband, who was as much surprised as she was. "Hop is ther greatest Chinee what ever sailed over ther big ocean!"

"Me allee samee likee my uncle, who velly muchee smartee," observed Hop, modestly.

The foreman's wife picked up the parasol at the suggestion of the Celestial, and holding it over her head, walked around.

It was a very lightly constructed affair, as might be supposed, since it had been inside the sectional hollow stick and doubled into many parts.

She gave it back to Hop, who wanted to keep it for future exhibitions, and then he proceeded to make it disappear.

It was only a minute when he had it in his hand, so that not the least semblance of a parasol could be seen.

He gave a flirt of the handkerchief and both the stick and parasol vanished.

They went into one of his pockets, of course, but no one would have been willing to take an affidavit to that effect.

Hop bowed right and left and said that he hoped his "lille tlick" had pleased Mrs. Gregory, and then he started to walk away.

"Hold on, dar!" spoke up Bolivar. "I done t'ought you say I watch de pan of flour."

"Oh, me makee mistake. Puttee um pan of flour on um head."

"Wha' dat yo' say?"

"Me showee."

Hop picked up the pan, and as quick as a flash turned it over and allowed the contents to fall upon the darky.

He was as white as the driven snow, and he could not see for the flour that had got in his eyes.

"Lat velly nicee lilliee tlick," said the Chinaman, blandly. "Me makee blackee man turnee allee samee white!"

Not one of the spectators could keep from laughing.

The darky certainly did look comical, and those who had been wondering what part the pan of flour was to play in the performance now knew.

Bolivar was very angry, of course.

But he could not see well enough to make a rush for the joking Celestial, and by the time he got the flour off his face his anger had cooled.

To make it all the worse for him, Gregory ordered him to clean up the flour.

It took him some little time to get the flour off his clothing and out of his wool, and when he did get in half decent shape he started in to clean up.

"Ise'll done git square wid de Chineese, dough; see if I don't!" he declared.

"That's right," nodded Cheyenne Charlie; "you're a fool if yer don't."

Bolivar looked pleased when he heard the scout say this.

It was not until after they had all eaten their supper that the darky got ready to get square with Hop.

He was ready, but he did not know just how to go about it.

He was afraid that he would not be able to whip him in a fight, so he wanted to do it in some other way.

It occurred to Bolivar that Cheyenne Charlie might help him out, as he had told him that he would be a fool if he did not get square.

He watched his chance, and when the scout was walking around in the rear of the house, smoking his pipe, he went up to him.

"Mister Charlie, I done want ter ask yo' a question," he ventured.

"What is ther question, yer simpleton?" asked the scout, grinning at him, for he scented fun.

"Would yo' mind tellin' a poor nigger how ter git square with dat fool Chinaman?"

"Oh, yer still feel as though yer oughter git square on him fur chuckin' ther flour over yer, hey?"

"Yes, sah, dat's what I do."

"Why don't yer lick him?"

Bolivar shook his head.

"He so smart with his tricks dat he might git de best of me if I done do dat," he answered.

"Well, why don't yer put up a job on him, then?"

"Dat's jest what I want ter do, but what am de job I done kin put up?"

"Yer want me ter figure out a job, hey?"

"Dat's it, Mister Charlie."

"Well, I'll tell yer what yer might do," and the scout scratched his head thoughtfully.

"What I do?" asked the darky, eagerly.

"Wait till I think."

Charlie was doing his best to think of something that would cause a good laugh and amuse all hands.

Finally he hit upon a plan that he thought might be a good one.

Gregory had ordered a calf killed that afternoon, so his guests could have some nice fresh veal, and the slain animal was hanging from a beam under a shed not more than a couple of hundred feet from the rear of the house.

When Charlie saw it he was struck with an idea.

The skin of the calf lay in a heap, where it had been placed preparatory to tanning, and it was the skin that struck the scout as being the proper thing to frighten the Chinaman, or if it didn't frighten him it would make some fun, anyhow.

"I tell you what you do, Bolivar," he said. "You jest put on ther oldest suit of clothes you've got—somethin' that yer don't care anything about—an' then come down ter ther shed where ther calf is hangin'. I'll show yer a way ter git hunk with Hop, an' yer kin bet your life on it."

"All right," and away went the darky to change his costume.

Charlie walked over to the shed.

On a bench was the liver, heart and "lights" of the calf, just as they had been laid by the man who had butchered it.

The head was still attached to the skin.

Charlie grinned when he saw this.

He stooped and spread out the skin, for it was his idea to dress the darky in it, and then let him rush at Hop unawares.

"I reckon I'll jest cut off them lights from that liver an' heart an' let ther galoot use 'em as boxin' gloves on ther heathen," he thought. "Jest wait till I git Bolivar rigged up an' have told him what ter do!"

The darky soon showed up in a very ragged suit.

He demurred a little when Charlie told him he was going to put the calf-skin on him, but finally consented to the operation.

The scout was handy at tying knots, and he soon had

Bolivar rigged out so his own mother would not have known him.

Then he put the lights in his hands and told him to come when he signalled to him, and for him to let out a sound like the bleating of a calf and rush at Hop and pound him with the spongy lights.

Bolivar said he understood just what to do, so Charlie left him.

He found all hands on the front porch, and Hop was seated under a tree, getting ready to perform another feat in magic for the benefit of Mrs. Gregory.

Charlie gave the signal and Bolivar, in his queer disguise, came up.

Everybody saw the man-calf before Hop did, for he was too busy making preparations for the trick he was going to perform.

"Ba-a-a-a!" said Bolivar, and then he rushed at the surprised Celestial on all-fours.

Before Hop could get out of the way he was being beaten about the face and neck with the lights of the calf.

"Hip hi!" he yelled in terror; "whattee mattee? Help, Misier Wild! Help!"

Then he got upon his feet and ran for his life, while Wild and his companions roared with laughter.

CHAPTER V.

WILD GOES TO SEE HAWKINS.

Bolivar ran after Hop until the calf-skin slipped from his shoulders and tripped him, and then our friends had more yet to laugh at.

Wild could tell by the expression of the scout's face that he was responsible for it all.

"What made you think of such a thing as that, Charlie?" he said, when Bolivar had extricated himself from the skin and started for the shed with it, satisfied that he had gotten square with the Chinaman.

"Oh, ther negro asked me ter tell him how ter git even with Hop fur throwin' ther flour on him, an' I happened ter see ther calf hangin' up, an' then I thought if he was ter git rigged up in ther skin an' start fur ther Chinees there would be fun."

"Well, there was fun, sure enough. Why, Hop won't get over that in an hour yet."

"It sorter made ther heathen galoot light out, didn't it?" and Charlie chuckled.

While he was not giving to practical joking, the scout had it in for Hop, since the Celestial had made him the butt of his jokes so many times, and that was why he enjoyed it so.

It was just about dark when the six cowboys Wild had interviewed that afternoon came riding in.

They had been relieved by others, and they were to get ready to start out for three days on the range in the morning.

Wild decided to say nothing to them that night.

He wanted to wait and see what they would do the next

day, for he meant to follow them up and keep a watch on their movements.

At the very first signs of any crooked work he was going to light on them in a hurry and discharge them.

Then if they did not like that they would have to take the consequences.

Hop Wah did not show up again until morning.

When he did appear he looked rather sheepish.

"What was the matter last night, Hop?" Wild asked. "You did not come back to do that trick for Mrs. Gregory."

"Niggee man allee samee no goodee," was the reply.

"He got even with you, didn't he?"

"Me makee niggee man velly sick putty soonee."

"Well, you had better look out for him. The next time he comes at you he will have a steer's hide on him, and he'll rip you apart with the horns. You take my advice and let him be."

"Me no likee."

"I suppose not. But probably he didn't like being covered with flour, either."

"You don't always get the best of a joke, do you, Hop?" spoke up Arietta, who was present.

"Niggee man allee samee biggee fool," was all he could say in reply.

It was one on Hop, and no one realized it any better than he did.

But he was going to go the darky one better before he left Champion Ranch.

That was certain.

But the foxy Chinaman meant to wait until Bolivar had forgotten all about it.

As Hop sneaked into the kitchen to get his breakfast with Wing Bud Gregory came riding up.

The foreman had been taking an early morning ride to see where Jerry Hawkins' sheep were.

"Well, Wild," said he, "I reckon there's goin' ter be trouble. I've jest been out near ther line, an' there's about five hundred head of Jerry Hawkins' sheep cleanin' up ther grass on ther best part of our grazin' grounds. There ain't no one out there watchin' them, either, an' they're more'n two miles on our side of ther line."

"Is that so?" asked Wild, without showing the least surprise. "I guess we'll take a ride over to the ranch of Hawkins and find out what he means to do. Come, boys! We'll settle this thing, one way or the other, pretty quick."

"It seems we always find trouble of some sort, no matter where we go," spoke up Arietta. "I had an idea that when we came up here this time that we would have a quiet time of it."

"Well, it is a good thing we came up, I guess," her young lover retorted. "Bud would have had a whole lot of trouble with Hawkins' sheep, and the result would have been that we were very much the loser. The sheep have destroyed a whole lot of good grass now, but I don't mean that they shall do much more of it."

"Shall I ride over with you to introduce you to Haw-

"kins?" Gregory asked, as they went to the stable to get their horses.

"Well, you can go if you like, Bud," Wild answered. "But I guess I will be the one to do the introducing. If he shows that he don't care about what is going on, and gets saucy about it, I mean to bring him up with a round turn. It makes no difference whether it is on his property or not, I am going to show him that he is fooling with the wrong people."

The four soon had their horses ready, and, mounting them, they rode off in the direction of the sheep ranch.

It was a fine morning and the bracing air made them feel in fine form.

They had not ridden far when they came in sight of the herd of sheep.

The hungry animals were eating away at the grass, taking roots and all, and they were in one of the richest parts of the range at that.

"Boys, the first thing we will do is to scatter that herd of sheep. When we get close enough we will spread out and ride on them, yelling loud enough to frighten them and make them start."

"That's it!" exclaimed the scout, nodding his approval.

With their horses at a gallop, they were not long in getting within the proper distance to begin operations.

"Now, then, let her go!" cried Young Wild West, starting off to the right.

"Whoopee! Whoopee!" shouted Cheyenne Charlie, turning to the left of the herd. Jim Dart and Bud Gregory spread apart in the centre and then all four went thundering toward the grazing sheep, yelling and firing off their revolvers.

The animals looked up in a startled way, but did not move.

Not until the four horses were within fifty yards of them did they start, and then they went for all they were worth.

There is an old saying that "they ran like frightened sheep," and here it was verified.

They ran just like what they were, and the dust flew in a cloud behind them, for the soil was pretty dry and the grass being eaten off so closely the hoofs of the sheep tore up the dirt.

Wild was glad when he saw that the ram that was the leader turned toward the property that was owned by Hawkins.

The four rode right on behind them, urging them on by their shouts.

Over the dividing line went the sheep, and after them kept our friends.

They were not satisfied until they had run them nearly a mile on the land they belonged on, and then they slackened speed and got together.

Some two miles distant they could see the ranch buildings belonging to Jerry Hawkins.

"We'll ride right over," said Wild.

This was satisfactory, so they kept right on.

A mile from the ranch and they saw two men riding out as though to meet them.

Wild was not long in recognizing one of them as Deadshot Pete.

The other was a hang-dog looking Mexican.

They met within half a mile of the ranch house, but our friends did not slacken their pace any.

"Where are yer goin', Young Wild West?" called out Deadshot Pete, as he wheeled his horse and followed them.

"I am going over to have a little talk with your boss," was the reply.

"I wouldn't advise yer ter do that. He ain't up yet, an' if yer make him git up he'll be in an ugly humor."

"Oh, that won't make any difference. We'll rout him out, and if he's in a bad humor we'll make him get in a good one before we get through with him."

The greaser looked surprised.

But Deadshot Pete had seen just enough of the young Prince of the Saddle to know that he was afraid of nothing, so he said no more, but rode up to the house close behind them.

Wild and his companions came to a halt before the door, and out came a sour-visaged woman, followed by four men, whom our friends instantly recognized as those who had been with Deadshot Pete and the crooked cowboys the day before.

"What do yer want?" snapped the woman.

"I want to see Jerry Hawkins and have a little talk with him," answered Wild, as he dismounted.

"My husband ain't up yet," she snapped. "You'll have ter come around ag'in. He was drinkin' putty hard with ther boys last night, an' he didn't go ter bed till about four this mornin'. He ain't ter be disturbed till dinner time."

"Well, you just go and tell him that the owner of Champion Ranch is here on business, and then I guess he'll get up."

"Are you ther owner of Champeen Ranch?" the woman asked, after she had looked at him a moment in silence.

"Yes, I am the owner, and this is my foreman, Bud Gregory."

"Oh, I've seen that sick-lookin' galoot afore. I know who he is," she said, casting a glance of contempt at Gregory.

The rest now dismounted.

Then the woman swept into the house, showing how angry she was.

"I reckon you fellers has made a mistake if yer come over here lookin' fur trouble," said one of the sheepherders.

"Well, we surely did not come over here looking for trouble," Wild answered, calmly. "I just want to have a little talk with the boss, as I said."

"Ther boss ain't ther man as will stand any foolin'."

"Just the man we want to see, then, for we are not fooling."

Just then the gruff, angry voice of a man sounded from the interior of the house.

The ranch owner had been aroused by the voices outside, and he was asking his wife what it all meant.

Wild heard her trying to tell him, but he did not want to hear it all.

The next minute Jerry Hawkins came tearing out of the house, his coarse hair almost standing straight and his beard awry.

He was a powerful-looking man of fifty, coarse and savage-looking.

"What in thunder is ther matter here?" he demanded, looking at Deadshot Pete, with his brows knitted and a scowl on his face.

"Young Wild West, ther owner of Champion Ranch, has come over ter tell yer that you've got ter keep your sheep off his grazin' lands," was the reply.

"What!" thundered the sheep rancher. "I reckon my sheep kin go where they please. This is a free country, an' if anyone don't want 'em on their land let 'em put up a fence: 'Sides, I don't say nothin' if a few of ther cattle belongin' ter Champion Ranch stray over on me once in a while."

The last was said with a glance at our friends.

Hawkins did not know just who the owner of Champion Ranch was, so he talked at all of them.

"I am sorry to hear you express yourself that way, Mr. Hawkins," said Wild, quietly. "You ought to know that your sheep can do more damage in half an hour than cattle could in three weeks. Now, I didn't come over here to get into any argument with you, so I will simply tell you that you must keep your sheep off my land."

"Is your name Young Wild West?" asked Hawkins, looking at him with just the vestige of a smile on his face.

"Yes, that is my name."

"An' you own Champion Ranch?"

"Yes, and it is all clear. There is no mortgage on it."

"Well, sonny, if that's so, I want ter tell yer ter go on about your business. If you see my sheep on your land jest have your cowboys hustle 'em off. That's ther way I do when your cattle strays over our way."

"Then you don't mean to make an effort to keep the sheep on your own side of the line?"

"No, sirree!"

"All right, then. The next time I find any of them eating the grass on my side I will order the boys to fire into them. We'll have mutton chops for breakfast the next morning. It is too much trouble to go to law about it, so we'll simply take the law in our own hands."

Hawkins looked staggered.

"Do yer mean what yer say, sonny?" he asked, with a gasp.

"I always mean what I say, my friend."

"You'll shoot my sheep, will yer?"

The ranchman fairly shrieked the words, and as they left his lips he drew a big six-shooter from his belt.

"Yee, I'll shoot your sheep, and you, too, if you don't

behave yourself," and Wild covered him as quick as a flash.

Hawkins turned white with rage and fear.

No doubt it had struck him very forcibly that he had met a tartar.

"Now, then, I want to know whether you mean to keep your sheep off my land!" said Wild.

"No!" shouted Hawkins, and, turning to his men, he said:

"Pepper ther galoots, boys! They've come over here to clear me out!"

"Ther first measly coyote what lifts a gun will go under!" cried Cheyenne Charlie, pulling his brace of revolvers.

CHAPTER VI.

A VILLAINOUS SCHEME.

There was no question but that Young Wild West was master of the situation.

Five of the men were mortally afraid of him, anyhow, and they had reasons for being so.

The greaser did not count for much in a square fight, and Jerry Hawkins could do nothing alone.

Jim Dart and Gregory had drawn their shooters the instant Charlie did, so the men were covered.

"I guess you don't intend to make a shooting-match of it, do you?" asked Wild, tantalizingly.

"Git off my premises," roared the ranchman. "You ain't got no right here."

"We came here on business, but since you won't hear to what I have to say, I'll go," answered our hero, coolly.

He turned his horse's head away from the house, but kept his eye on Hawkins as he did so.

He also held his revolver ready to use it at an instant's notice.

But Jerry Hawkins was thoroughly subdued, for the time being.

Cheyenne Charlie was the last to make a move to leave.

He was just itching for a fight, and it would not have taken much to make him open up the game.

But Wild saw how the situation was, and he called for him to come on.

Then the four rode off.

"This ain't ther last time we'll meet, I reckon," exclaimed Hawkins. "Take my advice an' leave my sheep alone."

"Keep them on your side of the line and I'll guarantee you that there will be no trouble," Wild answered.

Hawkins and his men watched them until they had disappeared behind a little grove a mile away.

Then he turned to his wife and said:

"I reckon I'll have my breakfast now, Susan."

"Tell me one thing, Jerry Hawkins, before I git your grub fur yer, what do yer mean ter do about them galoots what was jest here?" she answered. "Are yer goin' ter take water an' let 'em do as they like? Are yer that kind of a man? If I was you I'd have filled that boy with lead

afore yer could say Jack Robinson. I thought you was made out of better stuff than that. An' look at these galoots standin' around here. They acted as though they was scared ter death."

"You jest wait," was the retort. "You kin bet your life that I'll make Young Wild West sick afore he's many hours older. Go on an' git my breakfast ready."

The woman cast a withering glance at Deadshot Pete and the rest, and then she swept into the house.

But it was evident that she wanted her lord and master to have a good meal, for the sounds of frying meat could soon be heard.

It was not long before she called him in, and then the sheep-herders and the Mexican went around to the rear of the house and started up a game of cards.

The fact was that Deadshot Pete was a warm friend of the ranchman, since he had loaned him a sum of money to help him buy some stock but a week before.

That made it possible for him to do about as he pleased on the ranch, and he had been appointed foreman.

There were only six more men employed on the place just then, and they were mostly a bad lot.

Just now they were supposed to be out on the range looking after a larger herd of sheep than that which had been grazing on the land belonging to Young Wild West.

The Mexican had come up from Texas with Hawkins when he bought the property and built the house and other buildings, and he was a trusted man of the ranchman's.

Hawkins had not borne a good reputation down in Texas, and when he came up into Western Nebraska no one knew him or took the trouble to find who and what he was.

His ranch lay well out, and the only neighbor he had that his sheep could bother was Young Wild West.

The gang of sheep-herders employed by him were all of a disreputable sort, as we have already stated, so, being that kind of a man himself, there was likely to be crooked work going on.

Hawkins was one who would shoot at sight, and he had been feared wherever he had been, after he once became known.

But Young Wild West had called him good and hard, the same as he had done with many before him, and it was this that made the six men who had gathered at the rear of the house to play a game of draw poker, wonder what was going to happen.

"Cut fur deal," said Deadshot Pete. "I reckon ther old man will have his hands full now, unless he keeps off ther land that Young Wild West owns."

"I've got an ace," said one of the men, as he cut last. "I reckon it's my deal. I wouldn't be surprised if there's a big fight between ther cowboys of Champeen Ranch an' us sheep-herders afore many hours."

The game started and the players kept talking about what had happened, and what was liable to, as they played.

But soon they got so interested in the game that they forgot about Young Wild West entirely.

It was just about this time that Hawkins came out.

He had eaten his breakfast and lighted his pipe, so he felt in a better humor, as far as things were concerned about the sheep ranch.

"Who's a-winnin'?" he asked.

"Dan, ther greaser," answered one of ther men. "He's about four dollars ahead, I reckon."

"All right. Let him stay ahead, then. Git up, resh greaser, an' I'll take your place." ters.

The Mexican gave a grunt in the affirmative the promptly arose from the bench he had been sitting upon and let his boss sit down.

But Hawkins did not feel much like playing cards, and when he had lost a couple of dollars he got up again.

"Boys," said he, "I won't be satisfied until I've had satisfaction out of that galoot what owns Champion Ranch. It's workin' on my mind, an' I've got ter do somethin'. Pete, come take a ride with me. We'll see if we can't run across them six fellers what's workin' over there. It might be that they'd help us out a little in this game. There's one thing sartin that we ain't got enough good grass on this here land ter feed our sheep till we git ready ter make ther drive. They've got ter eat off somebody else, an' that's all there is to it."

"All right," answered Deadshot Pete, and he arose and went to get the horses.

Then the greaser sat down again and the game of poker was continued.

Hawkins and his foreman rode off in the direction our friends had taken.

They saw that the herd of sheep had got together again and were grazing within half a mile of the line.

The ranchman scowled as he looked at them.

"There won't be much left around there in a week or so fur 'em ter eat," he said. "There's a great deal more grass on ther range over there than Young Wild West's cattle will ever eat, so I reckon my sheep has got ter git ther benefit of it."

"Sartin, Jerry," answered Deadshot Pete.

"This here Young Wild West, as they call him, has started a war ag'in a bad man, an' I'll show him that he has. Ther first time any cattle comes over our side I want one of 'em shot. We need some meat, anyhow, 'cause I'm tired of lamb an' mutton."

"I'll see ter it that we have a fine fat steer to-morrer mornin', then, Jerry."

"All right. I don't s'pose it makes much difference whether ther steer is shot on this side of ther line or that one. So long as it is putty close ter my land it won't make no difference. This war game of Young Wild West's has started, an' we'll play it out fur all it's worth."

Pete turned in the direction of the clump of trees where our hero and his friends had found the cowboys and sheep-herders drinking whisky the day before, for that was a

was talkin' about. Hawkins, I kin take her ter your place, can't I?"

"I never yet turned any travelers away," was the laconic reply. "I ain't s'posed ter know whether anyone's crazy what comes there, an' has ter be locked up, or not. If you come along with a gal, an' you tell ther missus that she's crazy, an' needs ter be locked up in a room, it will be all right. She won't know whether ther gal is crazy or not, an' it'll be none of her business, anyhow. You understand me, I reckon. I ain't goin' ter git in any trouble ^{an'} but ther thing, in case it should happen ter go ag'in' us. ^{ther} go ahead an' do as yer want ter. Dan, ther greaser, will go with yer, 'cause he's putty slick at that kind of business. He kin do any amount of sneak work, an' that's what yer want on an occasion like this."

Ike was more than pleased to hear the sheep rancher talk this way.

He felt certain that he could manage to get Arietta away from the ranch now, as he had a crafty Mexican to help him.

And the fact that there were no men around the house just then but a couple of Chinamen and a darky made it look to be an easy proposition.

"Well, Dan," he said to the greaser, as he came over to him, delighted at the opportunity to go with him, "I reckon we'd better be off right away, 'cause ther quicker we git ther job done ther better it will be."

"All right, boss," answered the greaser, who could speak English about as well as the rest of the bunch, "I'm ready."

He got his horse and led it out from under the trees, and then as Ike mounted he followed suit.

The two took a wide enough circle to keep them from being heard by those in the camp on Young Wild West's side of the line and gradually drew around toward Champion Ranch.

They let their horses canter until they got within a quarter of a mile of the house, and then, for fear they would be heard, they brought them down to a walk.

"Dan," said Ike, "we've got ter be mighty careful about this business. I heard say that these here gals kin shoot as straight as men, especially ther one I want ter git hold of."

"That's all right," replied the greaser. "We won't give her a chance to shoot."

"I guess we had better get off now and lead our horses right up to that clump of trees near the house. The closer we have them there the easier an' quicker it will be ter git away."

"That's right."

They dismounted and did as Ike suggested.

They were then within fifty yards of the house.

"Listen," said Ike. "It's one of ther Chinamen singin'. What do yer think of that?"

"It ain't ther sweetest music I ever heard," Dan answered.

"I'm glad ter hear it, though."

"Why are yer?"

"Well, it shows that they're around on ther front porch havin' some fun. That's ther Chinees they call Hop. He's a mighty innocent-lookin' galoot, but they say he's all wool an' a yard wide."

"I never heard tell of a Chinees bein' any good," retorted the greaser, shaking his head.

"Well, never mind about him, 'cause we've got other business jest now. Come on. We'll git around there an' see what is goin' on."

Leaving their horses under the trees, they started for the rear of the house.

There was no one there to observe their approach, so it was easy.

Once at the rear of the house, they started around the west end of it to the front.

The sounds of laughter came from the front porch, and that meant that those at the house were gathered there.

It was Hop who was singing, as Ike had said.

Mrs. Gregory had invited him to entertain them, and he had offered to sing, no doubt as a sort of prelude.

It was queer singing, and it made them all laugh, though in reality it was a sentimental song in Chinese.

Hop had just finished when the two villains got far enough around the end of the building to look on the porch.

A lantern hung in front of the doorway, and this gave them a chance to observe all that was taking place.

The girls and the foreman's wife sat in a row on the porch, while at the other end were Wing and the darky.

Ike singled out Arietta and whispered to his companion:

"That's ther gal I want."

"All right, senor," was the reply.

It so happened that the girls had laid aside their revolvers, for they had not the least idea that danger lurked so near.

While Hop was getting ready to perform one of his magic feats at the request of Mrs. Gregory, Arietta and Eloise got up and walked to the end of the porch where the two waiting villains crouched.

They merely walked over there to exercise themselves, and meant to turn and walk to the other end.

In a spirit of mischief, Eloise gave Arietta a slight push and she went off the stoop to the ground below, a distance of less than two feet.

Then she leaped off herself and exclaimed:

"Catch me before I get around the house, Et."

Eloise was away like a shot, for she was a fleet runner.

Arietta laughingly started after her, but she had not taken three steps when she was seized and overpowered in a twinkling.

Her arms were pinioned and a rough hand was thrust over her mouth, cutting off the startled cry that came to her lips.

The girl had tumbled right into the trap.

Like shadows, the two villains bore the girl around toward the trees.

They allowed Eloise to get around to the rear before they started on a run, for they thought it best not to let anyone know what had become of the girl, if it was possible to have it that way.

And things worked their way to a nicety.

By the time Eloise got around to the front, and was waiting for her friend to appear, the two men were more than a third of the way to the clump of trees where they had left their horses.

And when Eloise discovered that Arietta had not followed her at all and started around the same way she had gone before to look for her, they had reached the trees.

That made it a case of a mysterious disappearance.

Eloise quickly ran on around, and then she gave it out that Arietta had hidden herself somewhere.

Then a search began.

But it was not until after five minutes had passed that they came to the conclusion that something was wrong.

Then they called to her, but of course received no answer.

By that time Arietta was being carried across the prairie for Hawkins' ranch.

Eloise got very much worried.

"It is strange that she would hide that way," she said to Anna.

"She is not hiding," was the reply. "Something has happened to her!"

"Oh, do you think so?"

"What else can it be? We can't find her nowhere."

Mrs. Gregory shook her head.

"I can't believe that anything could have happened to her," she remarked. "Come, let us look in the house. Eloise says she pushed her off the end of the stoop in a joke, so you can rest assured that she ran around and went into the kitchen and is now hiding somewhere in the house."

There was a hope that this might be right, so they went in to look.

But of course no signs of the missing girl could be found.

Then Anna thought how Hop had often been of great service in such cases.

She ran hurriedly to him.

"Missy Alietta no be found?" he asked.

"Yes, Hop; I think that someone must have caught her and carried her off. You go and look for her, won't you? I will send the dinky to the camp and let Wild know about it. You need not stop there, but go right on in your search. I have hopes that you will find her, for you generally have good luck in things of this kind."

"Allee light, Missus Anna."

Hop was not a little worried about the sudden disappearance of the girl.

He saw Anna go to Bolivar and talk to him hurriedly,

and then he knew that Young Wild West would soon know all about what had happened.

"Me go an' finde Missy Alietta," he muttered. "Me t'ankkee badee cowboys allee samee takee her away. Me no likee Jig-water Ike; me lookee for him."

Hop hastened to get his horse, and then mounting, he rode off in the direction he had heard our friends say they had found the cowboys and the sheep-herders the day before.

Just what he meant to do he did not have any idea.

But he was armed, and he also had the materials with him to perform some surprising tricks.

It was his sleight-of-hand that he relied on to help him to save Arietta in case she had really been abducted.

CHAPTER IX.

WILD MEETS WITH A LITTLE BAD LUCK.

Young Wild West found everything right with the herd when he got to them.

He waited around a while and then decided to take a ride over to the sheep ranch.

"I might as well find out just what Hawkins is up to if it is possible for me to do so," he said to himself. "The chances are that his men are out somewhere around here at this minute, but it may be that he is at the house himself."

Having come to this conclusion, he at once decided to carry it out.

So turning his horse's head in the direction of the sheep ranch, he rode slowly along.

Wild was not long in coming in sight of the house.

Light could be seen in the windows, but all was quiet about the building.

He had not lingered near the cattle more than half an hour, and as he had ridden slowly, just about forty minutes had elapsed since he left the camp.

In that time the rascally fellow called Jig-water Ike had accomplished a whole lot of villainy.

But Wild never dreamed of such a thing as was then in progress.

The dashing young deadshot knew that Hawkins and his sheep-herders would make it warm for anyone belonging to Champion Ranch if they got the chance to do it, but he had no idea that they would attempt anything like an abduction.

But it was not the sheep-herders, or their boss, either, who had planned to steal Arietta.

However, they were backing the leader of the crooked cowboys in it.

Wild did not go to the house.

He thought it would be a good idea to dismount and wait a while.

If Hawkins should come out, which he hoped would be the case, he meant to meet him and have something to say to him.

He waited for perhaps twenty minutes.

Then he suddenly heard the sounds made by horses approaching the ranch house.

Wild was waiting in front of it, about a hundred yards distant.

He drew his horse back in the shadow of a big tree and waited.

Nearer came the sounds, and he could tell that the horses were on a gallop.

But, much to his disappointment, they did not show up at the front of the house.

Leaving his horse under the tree, he started to reach the house, for he thought perhaps some of the riders had come after their boss.

In the darkness it was easy enough for him to make his way to the house.

He had just reached the front porch when a scream rang out from the rear.

There was no mistaking that cry.

Wild recognized it as coming from his sweetheart.

But it only sounded once, showing that the girl had been prevented from repeating it.

Revolver in hand, and tingling with surprise and excitement, the daring boy ran lightly around to the rear of the house.

He was just in time to hear a door shut, and then he saw two horses standing there.

"The scoundrels have stolen Arietta!" he exclaimed under his breath. "They have brought her here, too. Wasn't it lucky that I took a notion to come over here?"

The boy had calmed down wonderfully in a few short seconds.

He did not rush to the door and try to force an entrance, as many would have done.

He was going to get into that house without those inside knowing about it.

Then something would happen if his way was opposed.

Wild went to the door and tried it gently.

It was fastened on the inside.

But he had expected to find it this way.

Next he went to a window and listened.

He could hear the low voice of a man and the harsh, loud voice of the ranchman's wife.

What she said could plainly be understood, but he could not tell what the man said.

"This is what I call a pretty piece of business," he heard the woman exclaim. "You say that Jerry said it was all right fur yer ter bring ther girl here, hey?"

It was certainly a reply in the affirmative that she received, for she went on:

"'Spose we git inter trouble fur this? I don't see why Jerry is so kind ter a stranger as all this. Why, he never set eyes on yer till yer come ter Champeen Ranch ter work ther other day. He must have fell in love with yer, or he'd never take sich a risk as this. Dan, did you hear Jerry say that ther gal could be brought here?"

"Yes," came the reply from another man, and then

Wild knew it must be the one who had assisted in the abduction.

"Well, all right, then. Put her in ther attic room. I'll gamble on it that she won't git out of there."

Then Wild heard the voice of a man say in a louder tone than he had been using:

"Now, then, miss, I don't want to hurt you. An' I ain't goin' ter keep that handkerchief in your mouth any longer. But I want yer ter keep still! If yer don't I'll tie yer mouth so tight that yer won't have a good chance ter breathe free. If yer want me ter hurt yer I'll have ter do it!"

"That is Jig-water Ike, as sure as I am here at this window!" exclaimed our hero under his breath. "Well, he deceived me a little; there is no mistake about that."

He heard them moving around in the house, and then all was still in that part.

Then the boy coolly tried the window.

He found he could raise it.

The sill was not more than four feet from the ground, so it would be an easy matter for him to crawl inside.

When he got it up as far as it would go he thrust his knife under it to hold it there, and then he did not hesitate to crawl through.

It was a dark room that he had crawled into, and he knew that the adjoining one was where the voices had come from.

Wild could hear feet moving about overhead, so he paused to listen before going any further.

"This will be a sorry night's work for you, you villain!" he heard Arietta say, and then his heart beat faster.

She spoke in a very cool way, and he was proud of her for it.

"Don't worry about that; I know what I'm doin', Miss Arietta," came the answer from Ike.

Then a hoarse chuckle came from the hag of a woman, who was the wife of Hawkins.

Young Wild West smiled grimly.

He had left the window up, so he could get out in case he had to leave in a hurry.

But he did not feel as though he would have to leave in a hurry, for he was satisfied that there were only two men and a woman to contend with.

Wild felt for the door that opened into the adjoining room, found it and turned the knob.

As he pushed it open slightly a flood of light came through the crack.

There was no one in the room, he was quite certain, so he pushed the door far enough to get through.

There was a kerosene lamp on a table and it gave sufficient light for the boy to see at a glance that the room was devoid of a human being.

Footsteps and voices could be heard above, and just as Wild reached the centre of the apartment he heard somebody coming downstairs.

Through an open door he could see the foot of a rough flight of stairs, so he made up his mind to conceal himself.

He could have got back into the dark room, but he decided to get under the table that had the lamp upon it.

There was a cover which hung nearly to the floor, and this would hide him from view.

Wild got under the table in short order.

But as quick as he was, he was scarcely a second too soon, for the woman stepped from the last step of the stairs and came into the room.

After her came the two men.

Wild could not see them, so he hunted for a hole in the table cover to have a look at them.

He soon found one, for the cover was rather dilapidated, anyhow.

The daring young deadshot felt tempted to shoot down Jig-water Ike when he saw him grinning and rubbing his hands over what he had accomplished.

But he was not the sort to do a cowardly thing like that. If it came to the point where it was to save himself or Arietta he would fire a shot that would settle the villain forever.

"Well, now you've got ther girl up there, locked in, so she can't git out," said the woman. "What do yer mean ter do next?"

"Well, Mrs. Hawkins, I reckon ther next thing of importance will be a weddin'," was the reply. "I'm goin' ter marry that gal jest as soon as Young Wild West an' his pard goes under."

"Yer don't think I'm goin' ter tolerate anything like that, do yer, yer hungry-lookin' galoot?" cried the woman, her eyes flashing.

"Well, I reckon your husband will see ter that."

"He will, hey? I want yer ter know that I'm ther boss of this here ranch."

"I reckon yer are, but if he coaxes yer a little you'll give in to him, won't yer? Yer must remember that me an' my pards is goin' ter help your husband ter feed his sheep. He ain't got enough grass of his own, an' you ought ter know that."

This mollified her somewhat.

"Well, we'll see about that," she remarked. "I don't mind seein' a little stealin' done now an' then, but sich things as murder an' makin' young gals marry a galoot, when she don't want ter, won't go with me. It ain't goin' ter happen in this ranch, either!"

"Dan, you jest ride out an' fetch Hawkins here, so we kin settle this thing, one way or ther other," said Ike, turning to the greaser.

"Yes, go an' fetch him here," added the woman. "I reckon I'll soon find out who's runnin' ther inside of this house, anyhow."

Dan hastened to obey.

He had scarcely got out of the house when Young Wild West crept softly from under the table.

He was all the way out before either the man or the woman saw him.

And when they did see him they also saw a revolver pointed at them.

"I guess you folks have gone about far enough in this game," Wild said, coolly. "Jig-water Ike, I've a strong notion to send a bullet through your heart, do you know that?"

The villain turned as pale as death.

If there had been three men there, instead of one man and one woman, Wild could have handled them quite easily.

But Hawkins' wife was not the least bit afraid of the revolver, it seemed.

Instead of stepping back and crying out from fear, she suddenly made a leap for the boy and caught him by the arms.

It was rather unexpected to Wild, too, and he found himself at a disadvantage.

He wrenched his left hand free and then the woman caught hold of the revolver.

The boy could have pulled the trigger, but it would have shot her dead, as the muzzle was right toward her.

He did not want to do that, and so he got the worst of the game in a hurry.

Ike leaped forward and forced him to the floor.

The hag fell upon him, retaining her hold upon the revolver, and then Ike got his knees on the boy's stomach and his hand upon his throat.

He choked him while the woman took the weapon from his hand and tied his wrists together.

She was quite an adept at that kind of business, and nothing like fear came over her.

"There!" she exclaimed, when Wild had been bound hand and foot; "what do yer think of that, you hungry-lookin' galoot? If it hadn't been fur me we would have been in a nice peck of trouble, wouldn't we? I don't know how it was that ther boy got in ther house, but he's here, an' now we've got ter make ther best of it. I don't believe in murder, as I said ter yer a little while ago, but it won't do ter let this young galoot git out of ther house alive, after what's happened. He knows that ther gal is here, an' that's sartin. It's a bad night's work all through, an' I'm sorry that Jerry got in with a crooked gang of cowboys."

"Don't worry, Mrs. Hawkins. Everything will come out all right. Ther sheep will have plenty of grass an' I'll have a putty wife. That will make it satisfactory all around."

It was galling to Wild to hear the villain talk this way, but he held his temper, nevertheless.

He had recovered from the choking he had received at the hands of the crooked cowboy by this time, and he was simply lying on the floor and waiting.

He had not the least fear of being killed, and he knew it would not be long before Charlie and Jim would find out where he was.

Pretty soon the greaser came back, accompanied by Jerry Hawkins.

CHAPTER X.

HOP GETS BOTH WILD AND ARIETTA FREE.

We will now turn our attention to Hop, the Chinaman.

As the reader knows, he was a very shrewd fellow, and when he started to find Arietta he wanted to make a success of it, for nothing pleased him better than to do something that made him great in the eyes of those he served.

Hop rode along until he came to the clump of trees that was near the dividing line of the two ranch properties.

There was no one there, of course, so he paused and looked around.

He could see the campfire of our friends about a mile away, but he knew that Bolivar had gone there, so it was little use of his going.

"Me lide lis way," he muttered, and then he set out in the direction of the sheep ranch, though he was not aware that he was approaching it.

He brought his horse down to a walk after he had gone a short distance, for he was all at sea, and he knew not exactly what to do.

The horse kept on walking, however, and pretty soon he came to the strip of timber where the sheep-herders and their boss were lying in wait for the cowboys from Champion Ranch.

Hop heard them talking before they discovered his presence, and it was probably lucky for him that he did.

Instantly he was on the alert.

He quickly dismounted and led his horse to the edge of the strip.

Then he crawled along in the direction the voices emanated from.

Hop was just in time to hear the crooked cowboys and the rascally sheep-herders talking about the very thing he wanted to know.

He heard them say that Jig-water Ike had seized Arietta and was now at Hawkins' ranch with her.

Hop was more than pleased when he heard this.

But he did not know exactly where the ranch house and buildings were located, though he knew it could not be far from the spot.

There was but one thing to do, and that was to go and find the house, so he crept back to his horse and mounted.

He rode off to the right for about a mile, but the timber strip cut off a view of the house and he could not see a light.

Then he turned and rode straight ahead.

He got about three miles the other side of the ranch before he saw the lights.

He was not sure that it was the right place then, but he decided to ride up and find out.

He finally reached a tree not far from the front of the house, and then he was astonished to find Young Wild West's sorrel stallion there.

"Mister Wild must have comee putty quick, allee," he muttered. "He findee Missy Arietta, maybe."

It was just then that the greaser came out of the house and mounted his horse at the back.

Hop saw him as he rode away, and then he decided to creep around back and find out whether Wild was there or not.

He was not long in getting there, for there was nothing to interfere with his progress.

Once there, the first thing he noticed was that a window was raised.

He crept up to it and listened.

Confused sounds came to his ears, and finally he heard the voice of a woman.

Hop kept on listening until he heard enough to convince him that Wild had been captured, as well as Arietta.

He waited there, not knowing exactly what course to pursue, until he heard horses come to a stop in front of the building.

Then he made up his mind that it was time for him to do something.

Hop then unhesitatingly crawled through the open window.

Across the floor he tip-toed his way until he reached the door.

Then he dropped upon his knees and listened.

In the meantime we will see what was happening in the next room.

Jerry Hawkins appeared to be a trifle uneasy when he came in.

"So you've got Young Wild West, hey?" he asked, looking at Ike and shrugging his shoulders.

"Yes, boss, we've got him," was the reply.

"Why, how did he git here?" cried Dan, looking amazed.

"He was right under that table when you went out, I reckon," answered the leader of the crooked cowboys. "He come mighty near gittin' ther best of us, too. Jerry, if it hadn't been fur your wife he would have done it, sure! He jest let her catch him too easy fur anything!"

"Well, this is great!" exclaimed Hawkins.

"Great, is it?" snapped his wife. "I think it's ther worst thing that could have happened ter us. Here you've gone an' let that hungry-lookin' galoot fetch a girl here! Ther girl didn't want ter come, so I don't approve of it. But that ain't ther worst of it. Young Wild West comes along an' gits in ther house somehow, an' now he's here a prisoner. I want ter know what's ter be done now?"

"I don't know, Susan," and Hawkins scratched his head in a puzzled way.

"It's easy enough ter figure out what's ter be done, ain't it?" spoke up Ike. "We've got ter kill ther boy, that's all! It wouldn't do ter let him go, would it? We'll jest put an end ter him an' bury him in ther cellar. Then we'll go out an' settle his pards. After that's done it will be easy enough."

"It sounds easy ter hear yer say that; but don't yer think we'd be in a pretty kettle of fish if we was ter do that?" asked Jerry. "How long would it be afore ther disappearance would be laid ter us? No, we don't put

Young Wild West out of their way in that style. If he dies it must be when there's a fight goin' on between my sheep-herders an' his cowboys. If yer give him a show like that ther chances is that he'll live an' git away," observed the ranchman's wife. "What's ther use of doin' anything like that?"

"Oh, I don't mean ter give him a chance ter git away," retorted her husband.

"Why can't we kill him here, an' then say that he was shot while sneaking around ther house?" proposed Ike.

"That'll be ther thing! But where's ther gal? I'd like ter see her."

"She's up in ther attic room," replied the hag. "I hope you ain't gittin' interested in no young gal, Jerry Hawkins."

"Of course I ain't," he snapped. "Yer ain't gittin' jealous, are yer?"

"Well, there ain't no tellin' what a fool of a man might do."

"Jest light a lantern, an' we'll go up an' have a look at her."

The woman obeyed.

She had a way of obeying him, no matter what he told her to do, but she was bound to let her tongue have full play under all conditions.

The lantern was given him and then all but the greaser went up the attic steps.

They had scarcely got up there when the door of the adjoining room opened and Hop Wah stepped out.

He had a big six-shooter in his hand, and Dan, the greaser, gave a gasp when he saw the muzzle was pointed directly at his breast.

"If you utter a sound the Chinaman will shoot you," said Wild, in a low tone of voice, the instant he recovered from his surprise at seeing Hop there.

The Mexican changed his mind about rising and sat perfectly still in the chair he had taken when he came in with the boss.

Hop glided across the room, a grin on his face.

Out came his knife, and while he kept the greaser covered he cut Wild loose.

It was just then that Dan became desperate.

He dropped to the floor as quick as a flash and then let out a yell.

Crack!

Hop fired and the bullet could not have gone straighter to the mark if Young Wild West had aimed it himself.

The greaser rolled over and let out a groan and then remained perfectly still.

Wild darted for the hallway to run up the stairs.

But Hop stopped him.

"You gittee outside, Misler Wild," he whispered. "Me soon gittee Missy Alietta out of um house."

The boy decided to act on the advice of the Chinaman.

He had picked up his weapons the instant he had found his hands free, and with a revolver in his hand, he darted out of the front doorway.

Hop simply stepped in a shadow at the side of the rough stairway as the three who had just gone up came hurriedly down to find out what the pistol shot meant.

They almost fell over each other in their hurry, and that made more of a delay and gave Wild time to get out and the Chinaman to take his position.

Ike was the first to get down.

He darted into the room where the greaser had been left with the prisoner.

The former was there, but the latter had gone.

"What's the matter, Dan?" he asked, bending over the fallen villain, as the ranchman and his wife rushed in.

But Dan would never answer in this world.

Hop's bullet had pierced his heart and he was dead.

"Thunder!" cried Jerry Hawkins. "Young Wild West got loose an' shot ther greaser. That's too bad. Git after him, Ike. He can't be far away."

Ike ran to the door and looked out.

He could see no one, nor could he hear anything that sounded like footsteps or hoof-beats.

The villainous cowboy was afraid to venture out, so he came back.

"Why don't yer go an' catch Young Wild West?" Hawkins roared in a rage.

"He might pop me, same as he did Dan," was the retort. "I don't know where he is. He might be right at the side of ther house, fur all I know. I don't want ter die jest yet. Do you, Jerry Hawkins?"

"Oh, you're a blamed coward!" was the angry retort, and then, revolver in hand, the rascally ranchman rushed out.

He only went a few steps before he came to a halt, for, like Ike, he had an idea that Young Wild West was right at the side of the house, or some other place equally close by.

He peered through the darkness and presently stepped back to the door and raised his revolver.

Crack!

He fired at a rose bush near the corner of the house.

Crack!

An answering shot came before the echo of the first report had died out.

Jerry Hawkins fell back into the arms of his wife.

"I've got my billet, Susan!" he cried.

The woman let out a scream.

Ike, instead of going out to avenge the shooting of his friend, stood like one transfixed.

Just then Hawkins straightened up and began to feel of himself with his right hand.

"I ain't dead, after all, Susan," he said, with a sigh of relief. "Ther bullet went through my left arm. See, it's bleedin' like sixty! Thunder! I thought I was gone that time!"

The woman cried tears of joy and hurried her husband to a chair in the room.

"Oh, Jerry," she exclaimed, "this ought to be a warnin' ter yer! Let Young Wild West alone."

Crack!

Another report sounded from the outside and one of the ends of Ike's big mustache flew off.

Crack!

The other side went the same way.

Wild was outside trying a few fancy shots.

He wanted to subdue the villains and take them prisoners if he could, and he thought that was the best way to do it.

He now was satisfied that the woman was more than willing to let Arietta be taken from the house, and as her husband was wounded, it was likely that Hop would meet with little opposition.

He had fired at the man's arm when Jerry had sent a bullet close to his head, as he was crouching close behind the rose bush.

"Sit down, Jig-water Ike," he called out, suddenly.

The cowboy obeyed.

Just then Hop came down the stairs, followed by Arietta.

The Celestial had no trouble in getting to the attic room after the three came down, and he had soon liberated the girl.

He led her outside without anyone seeing them.

Wild moved over to them.

"Misler Wild, you takee Missy Alietta on your horse; me lide 'long, too," he said.

"All right," was the reply. "I guess we'll leave these people till to-morrow. Then we'll settle up with them."

They made their way to their horses, no one moving inside the house as they did so.

Young Wild West had surely cowed them, and they were not going to take any chances with them.

Two minutes later Wild, Arietta and Hop were riding for Champion Ranch.

CHAPTER XI.

THE REVENGE OF THE CROOKED COWBOYS,

Charlie and Jim were much excited when the darky rode up and told them that Arietta had disappeared in a strange manner.

They could get nothing further from him, so they rode for the house.

Bud Gregory went with them, of course, for he was bound to help all he could, and he thought that was the proper place to go to do it.

This left the five villains with the two honest cowboys.

Charlie and Jim soon got to the house.

Then they learned all about it that Anna and Eloise knew in a few words.

"I reckon ther best thing we kin do is ter go an' find Wild," said the scout. "He'll know jest what ter do."

"Come on, then," cried Jim, and, mounting their horses, they rode away toward the part of the range where the herd of cattle was.

They reached the herd, but could not find Wild.

Then they rode back to the camp.

As they neared it they heard angry voices coming from it, and they hurried to learn what was the trouble.

"Crack! crack!"

Two shots rang out just then, and then they knew something was wrong.

"Whoopee!" shouted the scout, and away he rode at a gallop, followed closely by Jim.

As they dashed into the camp they found but two men there.

The crooked cowboys had gone.

One of the two there was wounded in the calf of his leg, and he sat on the ground.

"What's ther matter?" called out Charlie, as he reined in his horse.

"Them traitors undertook ter drop us," was the reply. "We showed 'em that they'd have ter be putty soon ter do it, an' then we heard you fellers comin'. They lit out then. They're no good, none of 'em. They're as crooked as a ram's horn."

"Did yer fire at 'em?" Charlie asked.

"Yes, when one of 'em downed Jack I let one go at him," replied the man who was standing. "I reckon he didn't git very far, either."

Just then a groan sounded close by.

"That's the fellow, I guess," said Jim, and, dismounting, he hastened to the spot near the edge of the camp.

Sure enough, there was a man lying there.

It was one of the crooked gang.

He was just about breathing his last, too, and as Jim ran to get a brand from the fire, so he could see him, he expired.

When the two cowboys found that one of the villains had dropped they simply nodded, while the wounded one said:

"I hope it was ther galoot what give me ther bullet in ther leg. I'm goin' ter be laid up two or three weeks from this, an' I know it."

"Never mind that. Yer oughter be glad it wasn't your heart what got it," answered Charlie. "Where's Wild, do yer know?"

"We ain't seen nothin' of him since he went out right after dark."

"It's mighty queer," and the scout looked troubled. "What are we goin' ter do, Jim?"

Before Dart could make a reply a crowd of men came galloping up.

They were the crooked cowboys and the sheep-herders. Deadshot Pete was leading them, and as they dashed up he yelled out:

"Hold up your hands, you tame galoots! I'm after yer red-hot!"

Instead of obeying the command, our friends dropped close to the ground and got out of sight in the grass.

The wounded cowboy managed to crawl away, too.

Crack-crack! Crack-crack-crack-crack!

Several shots were fired, and then the villainous gang turned aside and dashed around the camp.

Not one of the bullets had found its mark, though they whistled all around the heads of the four.

Charlie fired as they turned to ride away and down went one of the horses.

Crack!

Jim let one go, and one of the herders keeled over.

There were a few shots fired by both sides, but the villains were not anxious to continue the fight, and they were soon out of sight.

They did not stop at the spot where they had been lying in wait, but went right on to the ranch.

The greaser had come after the boss just before the crooked cowboys came up and asked for help to clean out the four in Young Wild West's camp, so they thought they would go there, too.

The villain who had lost a horse had been lucky enough to catch the one that was left riderless, and so they rode in to the ranch in a hurry.

Hawkins was terrified when he heard the horseman coming.

He thought it was Young Wild West coming with his cowboys.

Not until he recognized the voice of Deadshot Pete did he open the door.

"What's ther matter here, Jerry?" Pete demanded.

The body of the greaser lay where it had dropped, and with the exception that there was a handkerchief over the face, it was just the same.

The villainous gang nearly fell over it when they came in.

"Who done that?" Pete asked.

"Young Wild West," was the reply.

"Where is ther young galoot now?"

"He got away," Ike answered, tremblingly.

Then Hawkins' wife related her story of the whole affair.

She did not know Arietta had escaped, any more than her husband and Ike did.

"I guess Young Wild West won't git his gal from here to-night!" remarked Deadshot Pete. "Come, boys, we'll go an' see what sort of a looker she is."

One of them took the lantern and went up into the attic, the rest following.

When they got there they were surprised.

"I don't see any gal here," exclaimed Pete. "Hey, boss, where's ther gal gone?"

"Ain't she there?" came from below.

"No."

"Young Wild West must have got away with her, then."

They all came downstairs.

Now that his partners were all there but one, Jig-water Ike was very courageous.

"I reckon we'll clean up Young Wild West an' his gang, won't we, pards?" he said.

"You bet!" came the answer from the four.

"He knows fur fair that we're crooked now, so we may as well let him have what's comin' ter him straight now.

He sorter cowed me yisterday, I know, but to-morrer will be another day."

"Well, I reckon you fellers kin leave here," said Hawkins, a few minutes later. "I don't care if ther blamed sheep starve. I ain't goin' ter interfere with Young Wild West, nor his land, no more."

"That's ther wisest thing yer ever said, Jerry Hawkins," exclaimed his wife, slapping him on the shoulder. "It was all right ter let ther sheep steal a little of ther grass from our neighbor's, but when yer was told ter quit it, an' found out what kind of a galoot yer had ter deal with, yer ought ter have done it. Now there'll be a time about ther kidnappin' business, an' it'll be hard fur us ter git out of it. You galoots light out of here."

The last was said to Jig-water Ike and his men.

"I reckon we kin sleep on ther premises till mornin', can't we?" asked one.

"Yes, but not in ther house. Ther shed outside will do yer, I reckon."

They took up their quarters under a shed a couple of hundred yards from the house and went to sleep.

It was just daybreak in the morning when Ike awoke.

He got up in a hurry and aroused the rest.

"Come, boys!" he cried; "we must be up an' doin'."

They were soon wide enough awake to proceed with what they called business.

Ike looked over at the house.

There was no one stirring.

Off in the distance the big flock of sheep could be seen making short work of the best grass on the range, but not a man was in sight.

Ike quickly appointed men to go to the various buildings and set them on fire.

The villains seemed glad to do it.

Soon there were flames coming from the barn, shed and two other buildings.

Those in the house slumbered on, for it was very early in the morning.

The flames gained rapid headway, and then the five villains rode away.

"Now fur Champion Range, boys!" cried Ike, exultantly, as he looked back at the flames. "It's Young Wild West's turn ter suffer next."

The sun was up as they rode out on the rolling prairie.

A mile ahead of them was a herd of a thousand cattle.

Half a mile below the herd was a small building that was occupied by cowboys when they were at that part of the range.

The house was some four miles away.

Champion Ranch was not nearly as large as some of the ranches now in the West.

The five villains came to a halt and took a look at the herd.

"A very peaceful sight, ain't it, boys?" remarked Ike, with a grin.

"Yes," answered one.

"We kin make it a lively one, I reckon. What do yer say if we start ther blamed cattle goin'?"

"Good!" came from all hands.

"Hold on a minute!" exclaimed Ike, as he looked toward the lone building on the prairie. "There comes someone."

"It's Young Wild West an' his gal, I reckon!" cried one of the men, who had better sight than the rest.

"All right, then. We'll stampede the cattle right fur 'em, an' if they git run down an' trampled ter death, let 'em. We've got ter git square somehow!"

The five men got ready to start in their villainous work.

But they waited until the two who were riding out over the prairie were well past the building, so they could have no chance to get to it so as to be out of the way.

They all could see that they were Young Wild West and Arietta now, and they waited with eagerness to see what show the couple would have against the cattle.

CHAPTER XII.

CONCLUSION.

Young Wild West arose pretty early the next morning. But he had not been out of the house long when Arietta appeared.

"Et, what do you say to a ride out to look at the cattle before breakfast?" Wild asked.

"It would just suit me, Wild," she answered.

"All right. We will go and get the horses."

They had just got them saddled when Cheyenne Charlie and Jim Dart came out.

"Great gimlets!" cried the scout. "What are you doin' up so early?"

"I awoke and found it was daylight, so I just made up my mind I was going to get up," retorted Arietta. "I found that Wild had beaten me, though. Now we are going to take a ride out to look at the cattle."

"Well, yer want ter look out fur them crooked cowboys, an' ther sheep-herders," Charlie cautioned. "It might be that they're up early this mornin', too."

"Well, we will take care of them if they show up," said Wild.

Then the dashing, handsome young couple rode away at a canter.

"Them two kin jest beat ther whole world, fur a boy an' a gal!" the scout declared. "Where could yer find a puttier couple, Jim?"

"Nowhere," was the quick reply, and Dart meant it, too.

They stood watching them until they reached the shanty away out on the prairie.

Wild and Arietta were certainly enjoying their early morning ride.

When they neared the herd of cattle they could not help admiring their sleek bodies shining in the sun, for they were certainly in fine condition.

They could not see the five men sitting in their saddles the other side of the herd.

Past the cowboys' shanty they rode and straight up to the cattle.

They were within a hundred yards of them when several pistol shots rang out from the other side of the herd.

Up went a thousand pairs of horns and a shudder of uneasiness passed through the herd.

The next minute there was a surging movement in the rear and then a fierce bellowing sounded.

The herd of cattle had started, and it was bearing straight for Wild and Arietta.

"Someone has stampeded the cattle!" exclaimed the young Prince of the Saddle. "Come, Et! We must make a race for it!"

Crack! crack!

Two shots rang out.

The two horses were now going at full speed straight before the maddened cattle.

There was no chance to turn to the right or the left, for the line of bristling horns was too long.

Crack!

A rifle shot rang out and down went Arietta's horse!

The girl was agile enough to land on her feet, however, and as she looked at the plunging, rearing, bellowing mass of live stock bearing down upon her a shriek left her lips.

Wild had been riding so fast that he got something like twenty yards ahead of her before he could stop his horse.

Arietta ran after him for her life.

"Save me, Wild!" she cried.

"I will, Et!" came the reply, though she scarcely heard it, for there was a thunder-like roar in her ears.

Young Wild West saw her danger.

Like a meteor, the sorrel darted forward.

"Keep cool, Et!" shouted the dashing young deadshot.

A moment later he reached her and caught her about the waist.

Away Spitfire galloped with his double burden.

With giant leaps he went over the ground, and, turning his head, Wild saw that they were going to win unless some scoundrel shot the noble horse, as he had done to Arietta's.

Our hero held his revolver in his hand, and as his keen eyes swept over the herd he saw a man riding close to the side of the frightened steers, plying a heavy whip.

The scoundrel was fully fifty yards away, but Wild raised his revolver and fired.

The man dropped.

The race was now plainly being won by the sorrel stallion.

When they were far enough to take the chance Wild swung off to the right.

He escaped that wing of the herd by a full hundred feet, and then the maddened steers went thundering by, raising a cloud of dust that soon hid them from sight.

Young Wild West turned and rode back in the direction the herd had started from.

"Get your shooter ready, Et!" he exclaimed. "I am going to punish the scoundrels who stampeded the herd."

I have already downed one of them. The man who shot your horse is the one I want in particular."

Spitfire was galloping like the wind now to get through the dust.

In a couple of minutes they could see ahead.

Four men were grouped less than two hundred yards away.

They were mounted, and were watching the result of their fiendish work.

They did not see the galloping sorrel until he was within a hundred feet of them.

Young Wild West had a revolver in either hand now and Arietta held the reins.

Her left arm was about Wild's waist, and with that hand she held the reins that guided the sorrel straight for the villains.

In her right was her own revolver.

"Give it to them!" cried our hero. "They are all that is left of the crooked cowboys!"

Then both began firing at the surprised scoundrels.

Before half a dozen shots had been fired all were on the ground.

The stallion came to a halt right before the fallen men.

Three of them were past all earthly aid, but the fourth was very much alive.

He was no other than Jig-water Ike.

The cowardly scoundrel had dropped to save himself when he heard the bullets whizzing about his head.

"Mercy!" shouted the wicked wretch, holding his hands above his head imploringly.

"You'll get no mercy here, you human fiend!" answered Young Wild West. "Dismount, Et, and disarm him. If he don't behave while you are doing it I'll shoot the eyes out of his head!"

The girl was upon the ground in a jiffy.

She took the weapons from the scoundrel with no trouble whatever.

Two horses were standing nearby, as though waiting for their owners to mount them.

"Get on one of those horses, Ike!" commanded Young Wild West.

Ike obeyed.

"You take the other, Et. We'll ride back to breakfast now. I guess the boys will get the herd together by noon. If they don't we can't help it."

At a word from the boy Jig-water Ike turned toward the ranch.

They rode back over the torn ground until they came to Arietta's horse. The animal was dead.

She dismounted, and Wild told Ike to halt and then followed her example.

Our hero took the saddle and bridle from the dead pony and then they mounted and went on.

Half way to the house they were met by Charlie and Jim.

The cattle could be seen in the distance, scattered all over the prairie.

But the majority of them had ceased running, and that meant that the stampede was over.

Many of them had been thrown and trampled to death by those that passed over them, so the loss would figure up considerable.

The whole thing was soon explained to Charlie and Jim.

A few minutes later they reached the house.

All there knew of the great danger that had threatened Wild and Arietta, for they had heard it from the cowboys who had seen them.

It is hardly necessary to say that the welcome they got was a warm one.

Wild had the prisoner placed in the out-building that the whisky had been hidden in and a guard put over him.

While they were at dinner who should come over but Jerry Hawkins.

"I want ter apologize ter Young Wild West!" he exclaimed, as he pushed his way into the house.

And he did apologize, too. He swore he would never again act wrongly to a neighbor, and that if he was let off this time he would show how well he could keep his word.

"My sheep won't bother yer ag'in," he declared. "If they should get on your land jest shoot every one of 'em, an' I won't say a word."

Of course Young Wild West forgave him.

That was the way of the open, generous-hearted boy.

While they were talking it over there was a shout from somewhere behind the house.

Wild ran to the kitchen door and was just in time to see a dozen cowboys galloping off.

In their midst was a man with a lariat about his neck. It was Jig-water Ike.

He did not interfere, but a little later he learned that the man had confessed that it was he who had shot Arietta's horse from under her.

This about winds up the story of "Young Wild West and the Crooked Cowboys; or, Arietta and the Cattle Stampede."

A true picture of Western life has been presented to the reader, and it is hoped that it has been enjoyed.

But there is plenty more to tell about Young Wild West, the dashing young deadshot, so look out for the next number.

THE END.

Read "YOUNG WILD WEST AT SIZZLING FORK: OR, A HOT TIME WITH THE CLAIM JUMPERS," which will be the next number (205) of "Wild West Weekly."

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